

**Association of Michigan School Counselors
and
Michigan School Counselors Association**

House Education Committee

June 11, 2009

Failing Schools

The Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC) and the Michigan School Counselors Association (MSCA) together represent the interests of all K – 12 school counselors across the state. We are pleased to provide this statement on HB 4787, 4788 and 4789 regarding failing and turnaround schools. AMSC and MSCA agree that there are many schools that need immediate help in order to best help students. However, we think the bills should also include an improved caseload for school counselors.

One of the primary responsibilities of a school counselor is to deliver accommodations, interventions, and pathways to ensure student success. School counselors are in the best position to assess the systemic barriers to academic success for every student. They are the professionals that have access to crucial data including student placements, academic success and failure, and course-taking patterns. They are in communication with teachers, administrators and parents and are able to access human resources in the community. In the past, legislation has set the stage for counselors to play a major role in moving students into and through the curriculum, and through the Michigan Merit Curriculum, counselors are more clearly involved in all aspects a student's curriculum.

To that end, AMSC and MSCA believe that serious consideration needs to be given to the growing ratios that are creating unmanageable caseloads. Quality program delivery and student success will be directly related to these ratios. Based on recommendations from the American Counseling Association and the American School Counseling Association, there should be one counselor for every 250 students. While many states have recognized that following recommended ratios leads to student success, Michigan has fallen behind. In fact, Michigan's high school counselor-to-student ratio is 354:1; more than 100 students per counselor over the recommended level. The K-12 ratio is much worse at nearly 650:1. A comparison with the five other states used as a model for Michigan's recommended curriculum, all have ratios near or below the recommended 250:1 (see attached table). Empirical research indicates that schools with fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs had students that earned higher grades, were better prepared for the future, and had more career and college information available to them. Additionally, other studies show that underachieving students that receive quality guidance and counseling services had significant improvements in mathematics and language arts. Clearly, creating manageable caseloads is critical to the efficacy of school counseling programs across the state. With the current emphasis on

moving all students towards postsecondary education, this need has never been more urgent, especially in schools that are presently failing.

AMSC and MSCA are working with Chairman Melton on an amendment that would require a turnaround school to have a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1. This ratio applies K-12, and not just in high school. If students do not have access to counseling services in elementary or middle school, often when they get to high school many problems are exacerbated. Further, the amendment assures that those counselors are trained in the implementation of the Michigan Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Curriculum, which is the ideal role of the school counselor. This program assures that a school counselor is engaged in curriculum development for each student, moving students towards graduation and postsecondary education, and still attending to acute needs of each student. Achieving success for all students depends on clearly defining the school counselor's role in fostering learning as well as ensuring that students have adequate access to professional school counselors. Thus, the full engagement of school counselors in a turnaround school is crucial to the academic success the bills require.

A copy of the AMSC/MSCA white paper linking school counselors to student success is attached. Please take the time to read this paper, as it demonstrates very clearly the role that counselors play in academic achievement. In fact, one highlight of the paper, shows that the overall graduation rate in Wyoming, whose ratio is approximately 222:1, is eighty-one percent, the sixth highest in the nation, and has the tenth highest graduation rate for Latinos at fifty-nine percent. Wyoming ranks in the top 10 for achievement in both reading and mathematics.

MSCA and AMSC would like to work collaboratively with the House Education Committee to add counselors to failing schools and ultimately prepare students for postsecondary and workplace success. However, while our organizations focus specifically on the role of on-the-ground counseling services to students, we remain supportive of the efforts of the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to assure that all school professionals, regardless of being in a turnaround school or not, are held to the same level of accountability and receive the compensation they deserve.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of school counselors in being an essential part of turning a school around towards success.

2003-2004 High School Student-to-Counselor Ratios

STATE	Rhode Island	Arkansas	Indiana	Oregon	Massachusetts	Michigan
RATIO	229:1	227:1	228:1	258:1	168:1	354:1

U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005.

School Counselors Linked to Students' Academic Success*

Introduction

The United States continues to undergo substantial changes industrially, occupationally, socially, and economically. These changes are creating significant challenges for students. A rapidly changing work world and labor force in a global economy, violence in homes, schools and communities, divorce, teenage suicide, and substance abuse are obstacles students must navigate. These challenges impact the academic, career, and personal/social development of all K-12 students. School counselors are trained to implement developmental and educational programs in collaboration with parents, teachers and administrators that are effective in assisting all students to respond to these and similar challenges.

As we entered the 21st Century, there was a shortage of school counselors in Michigan. This shortage was recognized by state legislators and reflected in the State of Michigan Public Act 288 (PA288), filed on July 10, 2000, which provides new regulations for the endorsement and licensing of school counselors, as “an effort to double the number of school counselors” in the State (Quest, 2000). To insure the feasibility of this act, monies (\$10 million per year for three years) were incorporated in the School Aid Supplemental Budget Bill to provide school districts with incentive grants for school personnel (teachers, social workers, and school psychologists) who wish to complete a master's degree or its equivalence in school counseling.

Given changing economic times, these funds are no longer available and school counseling positions are being eliminated in schools districts across Michigan. Currently Michigan has the fourth highest ratio of student to counselor in the United States at 648 to 1. It is the purpose of this paper to show that this ratio hinders the academic

achievement of students in Michigan and that school counselors are essential personnel for all students' academic success in all school districts and schools within the state.

National Perspective

There is clear and quantifiable success among states with low student to counselor ratios. Although the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of 250:1 students per counselor, for the purposes of this paper, a low ratio is considered to be anything under the national average of 479:1 as reported by ASCA (2006). The average ratio of the top 10 performing states in achievement in mathematics for grade 8 is 429:1.

According to the U.S. Department of Education; National Center for Educational Statistics (2004), Massachusetts has a student-to-counselor ratio of 463:1. Massachusetts ranks first in the nation in achievement for reading and mathematics scores in grades 4 and 8 on assessment data taken from the National Assessment on Educational Progress (2005). Vermont has one of the lowest ratios in the nation at 233:1. Vermont also ranks in the top 5 for achievement in both reading and mathematics. In addition, Vermont has a graduation rate of eighty-four percent, the 4th highest in the nation. Iowa, the state with the highest graduation rate of ninety-three percent, has a student to counselor ratio of 408:1 and also consistently ranks in the top 20 states for achievement in both reading and mathematics.

Additional academic success for minority students can be seen in West Virginia, where the ratio is 426:1; Montana, with a ratio of 344:1; and Wyoming, with a ratio of 222:1. West Virginia has the highest African American graduation rate in the nation with seventy-one percent graduating. Montana has the fifth highest overall graduation rate and the highest Latino graduation rate in the nation with eighty-two percent graduating. The overall graduation rate in Wyoming is eighty-one percent, the sixth highest in the

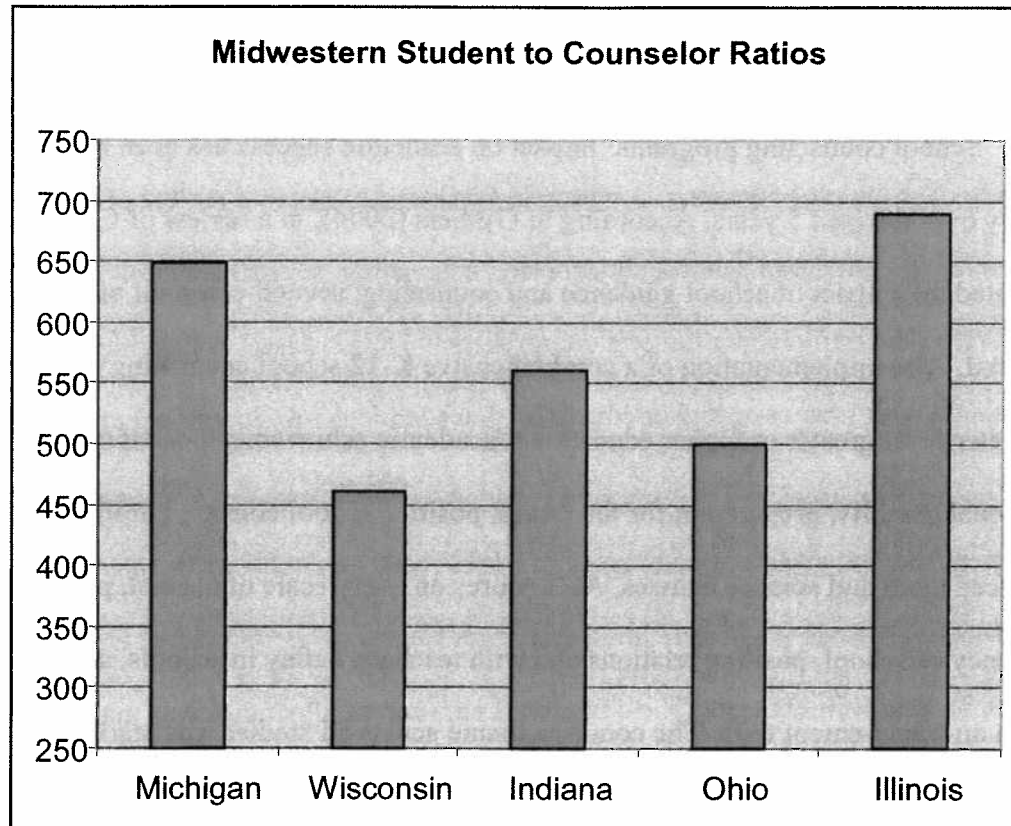
nation, and has the tenth highest graduation rate for Latinos at fifty-nine percent.

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School counseling programs' impact on academic success has been researched heavily over the past 5 years. According to Gysbers (2004), in a review of 6 studies that evaluated the impact of school guidance and counseling, several common major findings occurred. The implementation of a comprehensive K-12 school counseling program correlated with greater or higher educational/academic achievement, occupational level, emotional stability, preparation for the future, positive school climate, enrollment in advanced math and science courses, ACT scores on every scale of the test, perception of relevancy of school, positive relationships with teachers, safety in schools, and higher scores on achievement tests. The common theme across all studies was markedly better academic achievement. In addition, three studies of the six reviewed found that students with fully implemented K-12 guidance programs had greater occupational and vocational success after high school.

Midwestern Perspective

When compared to Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, Michigan ranks the second lowest in fourth grade math in 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data for mathematics. Only Illinois has lower 4th grade math scores than Michigan, and correspondingly, is the only state with a higher student to counselor ratio. Michigan's 8th grade NAEP scores are lower than Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio, and are comparable to Illinois. In 4th and 8th grade reading, Michigan's NAEP scores are significantly lower than Wisconsin and Ohio and comparable Illinois' scores. Among the Midwestern states, Michigan is tied for lowest NAEP scores with Indiana in fourth and eighth grade reading scores. The chart below represents the student to counselor ratios of these five Midwestern states.



Michigan Perspective

To understand Michigan's standing as it relates to school counseling ratios, information on Michigan public school districts was compiled from 2004-2005 school year data retrieved through the Michigan Department of Education and Schoolmatters.com, a service of Standard and Poor's. In computing the statistics presented, 19 township school districts and 22 other school districts were omitted due to incomplete data from the Michigan Department of Education. Therefore, the statistics reported are based on 517 Michigan public school districts.

These results show that 8.5% of Michigan public school districts (20,682 students) did not have any school counselors. Of the remaining districts, 38.2% had a student to counselor ratio of 700:1 or higher. Merely three relatively small districts maintained the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio of 250:1. In school districts with school counseling programs, the average student to counselor ratio

in the state was 684:1 ranking Michigan as having the fourth highest student to counselor ratio across the United States

The average student-to-counselor ratio in the states that required counselors in their school systems for 2004 was 445:1. Therefore, this ratio was used in comparing Michigan public school districts to each other in terms of achievement in math and reading, and participation in the ACT tests. Upon compiling this data, it was found that school districts that maintained a 445:1 student-to-counselor ratio or lower on average performed better in math and reading, and students were more likely to participate in the ACT tests.

Additionally, there were strong correlations between lower student to counselor ratios and school expulsion rates. The same Michigan school districts that maintained a 445:1 student to counselor ratio or lower on average had 57% lower expulsion rates than school districts with ratios above the 445:1 average or with no counseling programs at all.

Conclusion

Today's educational climate puts high demands on all students. Michigan students need to be academically competitive in a global economy. The importance of school counselors in helping students reach their potentials needs to be considered. At the current ratio of students to school counselors in Michigan, schools and school districts will have difficulty fulfilling their responsibilities as required by the legislature (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Education Yes, MEAP, Merit Exam, High School Curriculum Redesign) and maximizing student potential.

Although ASCA recommends a ratio of 250:1 students to school counselor, in these economic times it is important to ask what we can reasonably do. It is reasonable to ask the Michigan legislature to consider the national average of 479:1. The increased number of qualified school counselors for all students will facilitate the delivery of

essential counseling programs that have been linked throughout the nation with students' academic success and postsecondary occupational achievement.

* Written for the Michigan School Counselor Association by Jayme Pyne, Paul Mannes and Claudia Sowa Wojciakowski (January 2007).

Turnaround Schools Section

Sec. 531(2)(H) “Qualified School Counselor” Means an individual who meets 1 or more of the requirements of section 1233(2) of the Revised School Code, MCL 380.1233.

Sec. 532(3)(B) THE AUTHORIZING BODY OF A TURNAROUND SCHOOL SHALL ENSURE THAT THERE IS AT LEAST 1 QUALIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELOR FOR EVERY 250 PUPILS ATTENDING THE TURNAROUND SCHOOL, AND SHALL IMPLEMENT AND FOLLOW THE MICHIGAN COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE COUNSELING PROGRAM AS APPROVED BY THE STATE BOARD AS A PART OF ITS EDUCATIONAL GOALS.

- (1) THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION WITHIN THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION AND THE ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS, SHALL COORDINATE THE TRAINING, IMPLEMENTATION AS REFLECTED WITHIN THE MICHIGAN COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAM; AND
- (2) MONITOR THE AFFECT OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND THEIR RELATED SERVICES THROUGH ANNUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS WITH SUCCESS TO BE MEASURED BY CRITERIA INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY THE MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM, THE MICHIGAN MERIT EXAMINATION, GRADUATION RATES, AND OTHER CRITERIA CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE BY THE DEPARTMENT, THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION, AND THE ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

SSRO Section

1280c. (4)(d)THE STATE SCHOOL REFORM/REDESIGN OFFICER SHALL ENSURE THAT THERE IS AT LEAST 1 QUALIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELOR FOR EVERY 250 PUPILS ATTENDING THE SCHOOL, AND SHALL IMPLEMENT AND FOLLOW THE MICHIGAN COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE COUNSELING PROGRAM AS APPROVED BY THE STATE BOARD AS A PART OF ITS EDUCATIONAL GOALS.

- (1) THE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION WITHIN THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION AND THE ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS, SHALL COORDINATE THE TRAINING, IMPLEMENTATION AS REFLECTED WITHIN THE MICHIGAN COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAM; AND
- (2) MONITOR THE AFFECT OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND THEIR RELATED SERVICES THROUGH ANNUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS WITH SUCCESS TO BE MEASURED BY CRITERIA INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY THE MICHIGAN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM, THE MICHIGAN MERIT EXAMINATION, GRADUATION RATES,

AND OTHER CRITERIA CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE BY THE
DEPARTMENT, THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION,
AND THE ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

1280c. (8)(A) As used in this section, “Qualified School Counselor” Means an individual who meets 1 or more of the requirements of section 1233(2) of the Revised School Code, MCL 380.1233.